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TAGS: PREL PHUM KIRF CASC MASS OVIP VM HUMANR RELFREE

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH AFM HUNG: PM VISIT PLANS
AND CONCERN ABOUT CIRF RECOMMENDATIONS

REF: A. Hanoi 622; B. Hanoi 570; C. Hanoi 599; D. Hanoi 580;

1E. Hanoi 453

11. (U) THIS IS AN ACTION REQUEST: PLEASE SEE PARAGRAPH 4.

12. (SBU) Summary: The MFA is pushing the Embassy for specific dates for the proposed visit of Prime Minister Phan Van Khai to the United States. The GVN has some agreements in mind to use as deliverables, including an International Military Exchange and Training (IMET) agreement and an adoption agreement, if the remaining areas of concern can be worked out. The ship visit scheduled for late March can go ahead as planned. The GVN urges that the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (CIRF)'s recommendation to deny visas to provincial officials in provinces where religious freedom has been constrained not be accepted. End Summary.

PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT

13. (SBU) The Ambassador met Assistant Foreign Minister Nguyen Duc Hung March 14 at the latter's request. Poloff also attended. AFM Hung opened with the issue of Prime Minister Phan Van Khai's proposed visit to the United States. He said PM Khai planned to also visit Canada, and that the Canadian Government has offered two possible dates: June 21-23 and June 27-29. PM Khai would prefer to visit the United States before traveling to Canada, Hung said. His preferred dates for the visit are June 20-25, but if those dates are not feasible, he could accept June 26-July 11.

14. (SBU) Hung asked about the protocol for inviting the Prime Minister. Specifically, the Prime Minister's office would like to know if they should expect a personal invitation for the Prime Minister from President Bush, or whether there will be some other written confirmation (such as a diplomatic note from the Embassy) of the trip. ACTION REQUEST: Please provide us with acceptable dates for the PM's visit to Washington and advise regarding the method of inviting him.

DELIVERABLES FOR THE VISIT

15. (SBU) Hung also reviewed the list of possible deliverables for the visit, including a maritime agreement; an MOU on agriculture; a 505 agreement to allow an IMET program; and, an adoption agreement. The MOU on agriculture is nearly complete, Hung said, and the GVN expects to work out the details of the maritime agreement during a USG delegation's visit beginning March 21. The IMET agreement might be possible, Hung said, but the GVN has some "outstanding questions." The Ambassador summarized the content of the proposed 505 agreement and said the Embassy's Defense Attaché would be available to brief officials from the Ministry of National Defense (MND) and the MFA any time on the details of the agreement. Regarding the adoption agreement, Hung said the GVN is "trying to overcome some legal hurdles" to permit it. "The substance has been discussed many times," Hung added, "and now we are optimistic we will overcome the obstacles." The Ministry of Justice (MOJ) should talk directly to the Embassy about the adoption agreement, Hung and the Ambassador agreed. The Ambassador also noted that an Article 98 agreement and the framework for bilateral assistance should be on the list of possible deliverables for the Prime Minister's visit.

SHIP VISIT STILL ON FOR THE END OF MARCH

16. (SBU) Hung volunteered that MND had proposed postponing the upcoming U.S. Navy ship visit to May, but that he had pushed back and MND had agreed to keep the visit on schedule for late March. The Ambassador told Hung that, in his conversation with Minister in Charge of the Office of the Government Doan Manh Giao (ref A), he had learned that the Prime Minister had been in favor of the visit going forward as planned. Hung confirmed that the PM had directed that

the U.S. ship receive priority for a visit over a Thai vessel scheduled to visit at the same time.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

17. (SBU) Turning to the religious freedom issue, Hung said that GVN had noted with concern reports in the press that the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (CIRF) had issued a recommendation that the USG deny visas to some Vietnamese officials from provinces where local authorities have allowed abuses to occur. "If such proposals are accepted they will make big trouble for us," Hung said. "We have lived up to the promises our leaders made on religious freedom, such as in: the Implementation Decree for the Ordinance on Religion; an amnesty for several of the prisoners you were concerned about; and, the release of an Instruction from the Prime Minister that will lead to the reopening of churches. We would like a positive response from your side." The Ambassador reminded Hung that the CIRF is an advisory body and that, to the Embassy's knowledge, no plans exist to implement the recommendations.

16. (SBU) Continuing on the religious freedom theme, the Ambassador noted that Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom John Hanford's visit (refs B and C) had been positive but a bit disappointing in that he was unable to leave with an agreement. The visit provided Ambassador Hanford with a better understanding of the GVN's commitment to "expand religious space," the Ambassador said. The USG welcomed "the letter and the spirit" of the religious freedom regulations and instructions that had been provided recently (ref D), but is watching carefully to see how they are implemented, the Ambassador said. In the past week, the Ambassador noted, there have been reports of local authorities "not getting the message" or not believing that the new regulations are genuine. "This phenomenon is not surprising," the Ambassador said, "and can be expected in any situation where the rules change. The key will be how the Central Government reacts to cases in which the local authorities are not respecting the new rules."

17. (SBU) The Ambassador raised the case of Bui Dinh Thi, who was admitted to the United States as a refugee in 1994 but subsequently admitted to human rights violations while in a reeducation camp in Vietnam from 1978 to 1981. In a February 25 meeting with the DCM concerning Thi's deportation back to Vietnam (ref E), Hung said he would take a look at the U.S. request and identify an appropriate GVN point of contact to pursue a solution to the problem, the Ambassador added. Hung responded that the MFA's Consular Department is working on the issue and said he would provide a Consular Department point of contact for the Embassy as soon as possible.

18. (SBU) The Ambassador advised Hung that he will travel to Texas to give a speech on U.S.-Vietnam relations at Texas Tech. "The speech will be positive," the Ambassador said, "but I will raise human rights issues." Among those issues will be the cases of five prisoners of concern to the USG, the Ambassador added. Hung thanked the Ambassador for the advance warning.

MARINE